The Baptism of a Eunuch

As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?”

Acts 8:36

An angel of the Lord told Philip to travel on a desert road going from Jerusalem to Gaza, along which he would meet a eunuch. Philip followed directions from the Holy Spirit to go and stay near the man, who asked Philip to explain the passage he was reading from Isaiah (53:7b–8a). Philip was ready to answer the man’s questions and share the good news about Jesus.

Coming near water as they traveled, the eunuch desired to be baptized. He may have known that eunuchs were originally prohibited from the Israelite assembly (Deut. 23:1). We don’t know if Philip pointed the eunuch to the place in Isaiah where God says eunuchs should not be separated after all (56:3–5), but Philip did not hesitate to baptize him. After he was baptized, Philip was taken away by the Lord, and the man went on his way rejoicing.

Have you been baptized? Are you ready to share your baptism journey with others? Let’s be prepared and ready to share the blessing of baptism with others.

God, guide our words and actions so that everyone we meet will draw closer to you. Amen.

Melissa Henderson, Mount Pleasant, South Carolina


**Sunday, May 2, 2021**

**Everyday Life in God’s Presence**

**Scripture: Acts 10:44–48**

---

**One Small Moment**

*While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.*

Acts 10:44

There are few moments in my life when I can truly say that I have felt God’s grace upon me. The most memorable occasion is the Sunday morning of my son’s baptism. Holding Griffin in my arms, I could feel the Holy Spirit was present to me in a very tangible way. As I promised, with the grace of God, to grow with him in faith, hope, and love, a gentle presence embraced us both. And all was still as I felt the soft touch of the Holy Spirit fall upon us.

As I held my child, I understood a calling I had never felt before. The gift of the Spirit was inviting me to accept God’s gift of accompanying my son on his sacred journey to become his best self. I humbly accepted.

The sacredness of life is in the small, unexpected moments like the baptism of one’s child. And it is found in all the places where God’s people gather. Today, someone is needing you to hear the Spirit calling. You, too, can make a difference when you help someone, by the grace of God, to become their best self.

---

*God of this and every moment, thank you for grace.*

*Amen.*

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
Life during the coronavirus pandemic has been challenging. In fact, many of us have found it difficult to sing a new song in this strange land. In this way, we are not unlike the psalmists of old who also struggled to fulfill life’s purpose in their wilderness wanderings. Instead of singing, they, too, cried out in anguish: “Where are you, God? We cannot find light in the dark, hope in despair, and love amidst hate.”

I take comfort in the humanness of the psalmists. They help me to know that I am not the only one who cries out to God in both triumph and defeat, faith as well as doubt, hope as well as despair. And they give witness to God’s loving embrace. I do not have to be perfect. I do not have to hide my worry, anxiety, or doubt from God. I am loved.

The psalmists teach us that we do not walk alone. The music in us will return when all seems lost. And like them, we will sing again!

God of songs, help us to sing again. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
Be a Helen

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child.

1 John 5:1

Helen MacTavish, pie maker extraordinaire, radiated love and kindness in her lifetime. With each pie she baked, Helen’s hands worked magic, mixing in her gifts of love and kindness. Helen knew that you had to have just the right amount of these ingredients to hold people together when life gets tough. And with each pie she baked, Helen had someone in mind: a friend in distress, a loved one in deep grief, or a neighbor recovering from surgery. Her love language was pie, and when you unexpectedly received one, you felt loved and appreciated.

When Helen gifted you with one of her pies, there was always a light touch on the shoulder, an empathetic smile, or an encouraging word to let you know that she cared. The pie may have been the reason for coming to your home, but her presence at your door let you know that you were loved. And whatever you were going through, you were not alone. God was with you in the love baked into Helen’s pie.

To whom will you show God’s love today?

Piemaker God, inspire me to love. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
Surprised by Joy

“I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

John 15:11

Joy found me on a cold winter’s night. I had been asleep for hours when I awoke with a start. The eerie sound of the wind whipping ice pellets against my bedroom window had awakened me. But as I listened carefully, I heard the faint meowing of a cat. How can that be? I wondered. Shining my flashlight into the dark, I spotted a small tuxedo kitten pressed up against the tiny hall window. What to do? Well, there was only one thing to do! I let him into our home, and we named him Steve.

God’s joy comes to us in many unexpected ways, yes, even in the guise of Steve, the stray cat. My son had recently moved away, and I had been feeling a little blue without him. Steve came at just the right time. Be on the lookout for joy today. You never know how God will surprise you.

God of joy, surprise me. Amen

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
Thursday, May 6, 2021

Everyday Life in God’s Presence
Scripture: John 15:9–17

Courage to Love

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

John 15:12

Dear God,

It is hard to love. Each day begins with good intentions, but then I find myself saying words in the heat of the moment, and all is lost. It is like the words of loving kindness get stuck in my throat, and I find myself judging, complaining, and grumbling. And I do not understand why.

I pray today asking for the courage to love others as you love me. Grant me the strength to live your love, to bring light to the darkness and understanding to the differences that exist in my relationships with others. The world does not need more hate. It needs more love.

As I stand within the welcoming embrace of your steadfast love, fill me with the courage and strength to choose the way of loving compassion. I am only one among many who need to remember that your love is for all and not just a few.

I pray asking to be a reservoir of your love, overflowing into the lives of others. Amen.

God, let your love prevail. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
An Open Door

Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Acts 10:48b

He walked into First United Church in the downtown eastside of Vancouver, British Columbia, with nothing but the clothes on his back. His truck, wallet, tent, and other personal belongings had been stolen while he was camping in the mountains. After a few days’ walk out of the woods, he found his way to us early one afternoon. As he said, “I did not know where else to go where I might be taken in.”

First United Church is an open door where the ministry of presence is of the utmost importance. Economic status, gender identity, skin color, or the language you speak does not determine how you are welcomed or who receives help in their time of need.

As the body of Christ, you and I are also called to do the work of God’s love in the world. When it comes to hospitality, there are no unimportant people and no unimportant acts of kindness. There are only people who need us to be an open door.

God, help us to show your hospitality to all. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
Kim’s Kitchen in Fredericton, New Brunswick, was born out of the urgent need to feed hungry students within our local schools. Each day, volunteers gather in the kitchen to make two hundred sandwiches so that no student goes without a healthy lunch.

It is beyond comprehension that in today’s affluent society, children go without food. And it further boggles the mind to know that Kim’s Kitchen survives solely on the kindnesses of volunteers and individual monetary donations. There is no government funding. There are real challenges to keeping this good work going, but Kim’s Kitchen was born of godly mercy, empowered by God to conquer the world with love.

What is waiting to be born in you? How will you do justice and love kindness in the place where you live? How will you conquer the world?

Giving God, take me where I need to go. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
I can hear my mother’s words ringing in my ears: “If you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything.”

In her own quiet way, my mother stands up for what she believes. Her standing up for the less fortunate in our community is not about making speeches or writing letters to the government. Rather, mum stands up with a cooler in one hand and ice cream cones in the other.

Let me explain. On a very hot day last August, I spied a spry seventy-nine-year-old woman carrying a small cooler to a group of homeless men sitting on a park bench. As I watched, she opened the cooler and started handing out ice cream. As I got closer, I could hear her calling each man by name and asking about their day. That spry elderly woman was my mum.

Peter stood up for what he believed and so does my mum, each doing so in their own way. God still needs his believers to make a difference. Someone somewhere needs your voice.

God, help us to stand up for what is right and good. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
The House on the Hill

Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord.

Psalm 1:1–2a

Every time I read the psalmist’s words, I think of my Sunday school teacher Mrs. Betty Brooks. She was round and plump, with light grey hair and soft blue eyes. She also taught me about happiness in that little house on the hill where she lived.

Mrs. Brooks did not have any children of her own, but she knew what to say to the teenagers who visited her. When I think back to the twelve-year-old girl I once was, I wonder if I would have made it through those teenage years in one piece without her quiet presence in my life. She taught me to tie the threads of my happiness to my faith in God and in the people who loved me. Happiness would be found in delighting in the Lord. Things were not important. Almost fifty years later, Betty’s wisdom lives on in my life.

God, thank you for the Mrs. Brookses in our lives.
Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
Strong Together

*Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart.”*

Acts 1:24a

Matters of the heart are sacred. Yet often we do not share the depth of what our hearts hold, not even with God. Perhaps we are afraid of being misunderstood or rejected. It isn’t always easy to reconcile what our hearts carry: old wounds, regrets, lies, betrayals, and other difficult memories.

We belong to a God who walks with us and wants to hear about the things of our hearts. Our God, who is a refuge and strength to us in times of trouble, offers grace. And it is with this reassurance of grace that God reaches out to us, wanting to walk with us through the darkest valleys.

Today, take a moment to still your heart and breathe in the love of God. Rest in the assurance that your heart is already known to the one who loved you into being, the one who listens to all you hold sacred.

So go ahead, talk with God, who knows you! Unburden the heaviness of your heart.

*Guardian of our hearts, hear our deepest prayers.*

*Amen.*

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
ROOTS GROW DEEP

_They are like trees planted by streams of water._

Psalm 1:3

There is nothing like cancer to make you realize that you are walking this earth on borrowed time. Every moment of every day becomes more precious. The threads of happiness that were once tied to promotions, awards, trips, and investment portfolios take on new meaning. In fact, they do not matter anymore.

In the blink of an eye, happiness is about the people you love and those who love you. Cancer is a willing teacher with much wisdom to offer about what it means to live a happy life. I know this to be true, and so do many of you.

The psalmist is right when he compares happy people to trees. Like trees with a deep and strong root structure that can withstand heavy winds without toppling to the ground in a storm, so, too, can we stay strong when our happiness is rooted in the grace of God and the love of our family and friends.

__

God, may our happiness be rooted in your love. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
A Prayer for You

“Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

John 17:11b

Dear child,

You are facing challenging times, with more fear than hope and more hate than love. You grow weary from all the worry. I understand. This kind of life was not my intention. It has always been my prayer for you that the world be as one.

How long will it take for you to understand that bigotry, misogyny, racism, and ageism are sources of division, spreading hate, not love? Do you not understand what Jesus meant when he said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12)?

My heart weeps as I write to you. Tears flow as I witness the divisions between my people. Please change your ways. You were created to be a light in the dark, hope in despair, and love everlasting. I know you are only one, but will you be the light through which others see me? The world needs you, and so do I.

Love, God

God, inspire us to be as one. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
What I Believe

Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts.

1 John 5:10a

“What do you believe?” I asked my first-year university students. The room went silent. I can still see the quizzy-cal expressions on some of their faces. One student said, “No one has ever wanted to know what I believe.” And with that great comment, the classroom caught fire. Everyone started talking at once. I humbly learned that my students believed in love, kindness, family, helping others, and second chances, and some of them even believed in God.

For the rest of the year, while the students and I studied world religions, I also like to think that they learned more about who they were and the beliefs that impacted the lives they led and the choices they made each day.

Our beliefs influence the lives we lead. Do you know what you believe? Perhaps today is a good day to find out. Like my students, you may be surprised to find out what brings you strength and hope.

God, inspire my beliefs. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
Your Special Purpose

“As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

John 17:18

Take a moment to be still within and breathe in the love of God. Do you feel connected to your own unique way of giving and receiving love in your life? Or are you feeling disconnected from the purposeful life God is calling you to?

Perhaps, like my friend Susan, you are feeling that you do not have much to offer. Just the other day, she texted these words: “Life is tough sometimes. I wonder how brightly I shine. But it is my intention.” More than anyone I know, Susan always shines and always has. But perhaps like her, you, too, are having a day when you do not feel that you are shining brightly enough to make a difference. You also wonder why God would send you into the world when you cannot shine.

God sends you into the world today because you are unique, funny, kind, brave, faithful, and so much more. And your special purpose is waiting to be fulfilled only in whatever way you are able. You have been called by name. What are you waiting for?

God, help me to shine brightly. Amen.

Kelly Higgins, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
The Church That Came Alive

“I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,” says the LORD.

Ezekiel 37:14

“It’s a dying church,” the committee told me. “Your job is to help them close gracefully.” What I found in that church, however, was not a discouraged but a determined Holy Spirit that declared, “Not yet!” But how could that Spirit, so apparent in this small congregation, be expressed?

“Let’s invite our presbytery of 110 churches to hold their quarterly meeting here and show them hospitality like they’ve never experienced before!” somebody said. So that’s what we did. There were moments of panic as the date for our presbytery meeting drew closer. More than two hundred people would be coming, although the sanctuary seated only one hundred. Those who trust our Lord, however, discover that our Lord provides, in our case via folding chairs. Everyone packed our sanctuary that day, and the meeting was a big success. Dry bones came to life. The church has not been the same since.

Lord, may we never underestimate your enlivening Spirit. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Prayers of Laughter

“Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.”

Acts 2:15

Our support group for those dealing with mental illness met on the first Monday of every month. We often started with a lectio divina approach to a Scripture passage. Each person listened for a particular word or phrase in the passage that stood out for them. We’d all had some painful experiences in life and were always looking for a word of hope. Often we found it in Scripture. After we listened to the passage read three times, we each explained how we thought the Spirit was speaking to us that evening.

We had some fascinating discussions and shared some very personal stories. What was surprising, however, was that rather than burdening our group with sorrow and worry, the personal sharing often lead to freedom and laughter. I sometimes wondered if anyone who happened to pass by our meeting place and heard our laughter would question, like those witnesses to the day of Pentecost, “Are they drunk?” No one ever stuck their head in to ask what exactly we were up to. But if they did, thanks to St. Peter, I had a ready reply, “No! We’re not drunk. We are just rejoicing in the Spirit of God.”

Lord, we offer you today our prayers of laughter. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
The Richness of Creation

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

Psalm 104:24

We were surrounded by wild creatures when we lived on the Presbyterian camp. Deer, armadillos, and owls crossed our path. We were never alone and could declare with the psalmist, “O Lord, the earth is full of your creatures.”

Now that we have moved to a retirement community with trimmed lawns and paved streets, we expected our animal sightings to decrease. Yet that hasn’t been the case. Even when confined to our apartment for days at a time because of the coronavirus pandemic, we are visited every day by a whole new set of God’s creatures. Birds feast at our bird feeder. Squirrels and chipmunks gather below. Occasionally a hawk sails past, and every other creature disappears. A rabbit passes through. Frogs give voice to a mighty chorus after every rain. Even earthworms make their slow way across our patio, and the wolf spiders hunting their prey in the grass are fascinating to watch. And once, while driving through a busy city, we spotted a wild turkey in the grassy median of a four-lane road.

We praise you, O Lord, for the richness of your creation.
Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Joyful Groaning

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. . . . We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Romans 8:22–23

It may seem silly to groan over a tomato seed. Yet that is what I find myself doing every spring. I plant those tomato seeds in small pots of soil, add water, and set them in a sunny place on my patio. Every day I inspect them, as though that might speed up their birth process. Then, when they finally begin poking out of the soil, gently bent and ready to uncurl, I catch myself groaning, joyfully groaning, in anticipation. At last, new life is emerging!

I do not know if Paul ever grew tomatoes. But I understand his anticipation and every soul’s anticipation for the new life, joy, and freedom of Christ’s Spirit as it emerges in our lives. This new life in Christ cannot just be intellectually grasped; it has to be experienced. There may be no better way of expressing this emergence than to see this Spirit being born in us each day. Are you looking for the evidence of Christ’s Spirit emerging in your life today? Are you groaning in anticipation?

Lord, hear our prayers of anticipation and satisfy our longing for new life. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Bag of Bones

He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.”

Ezekiel 37:3

She was just a bag of bones lying there on my front porch. The only sign of life was her tail thumping against the wooden floor. Such a pathetic brown dog with sores covering her skin, yet she had such a kind face. She won my heart. First came a good meal and then a bath. For a whole month, I fattened her up and treated her sores until nothing showed on her coat except small, smooth scars. We became good friends.

Living alone at that time in a rural setting, I was glad to have a protector who barked when strangers approached the yard. I was grateful to have a friend who chased the critters out of my garden. Whenever we took a walk, she became so excited chasing a squirrel up a tree or flushing birds out of the tall grass. I never ceased to marvel about how what was once a bag of bones, like the field Ezekiel saw, could become so full of vibrant life. Praise be to God, who breathes new life into us all.

What will you reveal today, Lord, that we might witness your Spirit of life?

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Spirit of Truth

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.”

John 15:26

Times when I have been taken by surprise, embarrassed in my unpreparedness, and stammering in my response to unexpected situations are sometimes the moments when I have been most truthful. How can that be?

As Jesus prepares to leave his disciples and wants to entrust them with his ministry, he tells them not to worry when they find themselves in a difficult situation and are at a loss for words. Jesus explains that there will be a Spirit of Truth, his own Spirit, that they can trust to speak through them. I have always tried to be prepared, but life has taught me how difficult, if not impossible, this can be sometimes. There are always surprises, no matter how thoroughly I prepare. So I am hoping I might learn to be more relaxed. I hope I might learn to put more trust in the one who works within and around me. I trust Christ’s Spirit will help me find the right words to say and the courage to do what I must do whenever life surprises me.

Lord, help me, help us all, to trust you, our Spirit of Truth. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
One Language

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. . . . And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

Acts 2:4, 6

I expected it to be a struggle when I went to worship as an English-speaking Presbyterian in a Spanish-speaking Pentecostal church. So I was relieved to hear the pastor say that the service would be testimony in song. Each member stood before the congregation and sang beautifully. I sat enthralled until I heard the pastor call my name.

I panicked and politely declined. But the good pastor was not easily dissuaded. “This is how we give glory to our Lord, Brother Bill. Just give us one song?” I could not refuse. I’d never felt more desperate. I searched my anxious mind for anything appropriate, and after a long pause, I decided on “Just a Closer Walk.” I made it through one verse and started the chorus when I sensed a stirring in the congregation. They were singing with me. I sang in English, they in Spanish, but we were all speaking one language: the language of faith. It was truly a pentecostal moment.

Free us, Lord, to speak the language that all your children understand. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Beyond Our Control

Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

John 3:4

Whatever you may think of Nicodemus, you have to admire his persistence. He struggles to understand this strange, uncontrollable Spirit who Jesus describes. It must have been extremely challenging for Nicodemus, a well-educated, highly respected, deeply religious man. I believe he wants to make this Spirit fit into his life but can’t. Yet he never gives up on Jesus. Nicodemus’s soul seems to long for what his mind cannot quite grasp. I hope we might show this same persistence in faith as we follow the impulse of our own souls. It is tempting to shy away when challenging new scriptural truths appear in a passage we thought we understood. Yet how can we? If we really trust this Spirit who is intent on constantly surprising us and offering us rebirth, don’t we have to trust Christ’s Spirit in Scripture more than our own interpretation? Don’t we have to live with discomfort sometimes as we await whatever new thing God is creating in our lives?

Lord, grant us persistence and the willingness to be reborn. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Monday, May 24, 2021

TRUSTING THE SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE: John 3:1–10

Expectant Waiting

“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

John 3:8

“These woods are teeming with wildlife!” That’s what I was told when I accepted the job as a Presbyterian camp director. Yet despite practicing my best observation skills while walking through the woods, I saw nothing but trees. Then, in a few days’ span, I spotted a herd of deer, a mother armadillo with four babies, two barred owls, and a flock of wild turkeys. It was as though the creatures were waiting to see if I would be a trustworthy and permanent neighbor before revealing themselves to me. I suspect Nicodemus was practicing his best interpretative skills as he listened intently to Jesus explaining the Spirit. Yet, in his well-intended encounter with Jesus, Nicodemus fails to see. Maybe Nicodemus was trying too hard. Maybe it is not his fault. The Spirit he struggles to grasp must instead grasp him. When the time is right, God will act. As we seek the Spirit ourselves, the best skill we can practice may be expectant waiting. God chooses the time.

When we are ready, Lord, gift us with your Spirit. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Drawn to the Light

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

John 3:1–2

It was an all-night trip. Because the whole distance was driven on lesser-used highways, we were surrounded by darkness most of the time. Except for an occasional farmhouse, the only light we saw was from our own headlights. Finally, a glow in the distance raised our hope. But the source of light turned out to be a twenty-four-hour gas station. That didn’t dim our relief and gratitude. Even though we did not need gas, we lingered there for quite a while, hesitant to venture back out into the night. Just being there in that lighted space, able to see our surroundings and one another clearly, seemed to satisfy a deep need.

The Gospel of John tells us that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Perhaps John is trying to show us, through Nicodemus’s nighttime visit to Jesus, that Nicodemus was drawn to Jesus as the light of the world. Maybe we are all like Nicodemus in this regard.

Draw us, O Lord, out of our darkness and into your light. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Trust above All

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

John 3:14–15

An intriguing story appears in the midst of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus knows the only way Nicodemus can understand him is if Nicodemus trusts him completely. So Jesus reminds Nicodemus of this incident in their shared history.

The Israelites who followed Moses through the wilderness had lost trust in God (again). Suffering was the result, as God sent poisonous serpents to invade their camp. Many people were bitten and cried to Moses for relief. Moses cried to God, and God responded by instructing Moses to raise up a bronze replica of a serpent as a reminder to put their trust in God. The people looked upon the bronze serpent, renewed their trust in God, and lived.

This story in Numbers 21:4–9 is a strange one, but ultimately it relays a message of trust. It was a timely lesson for Nicodemus and is a powerful lesson for us. Our relationship with Christ begins and ends with trust. We may build faith from our life’s experiences, but the foundation is trust.

Lord, with our heart, mind, and strength we put our trust in you. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Lord over the Storm

The voice of the Lord is over the waters; 
the God of glory thunders, 
the Lord, over mighty waters.

Psalm 29:3

The storm blew in suddenly. There was earth-shaking thunder followed by buckets of rain. I wished I was at home in my snug house; instead I was huddled in a small tent in an open field. I not only heard and saw this storm but also felt it in my bones. I was not too scared because I knew the tent provided secure shelter, but I was certainly respectful. I was in the midst of a display of power that rattled my soul.

The psalmist pictures our God as Lord over the storm, using the forces of nature to express his power. This God speaks with a voice that “flashes forth flames,” “shakes the wilderness,” “causes the oaks to whirl,” and everyone to shout “Glory!” (vv. 7–9). This is a God who elicits awe. Sometimes we are in need of the comfort and soft voice of God. But lest we are tempted to become too chummy with our God, this psalm helps us remember and experience God’s awesome power. Glory be to God!

Powerful God, we join heaven, earth, and all creation in crying, “Glory!” Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Reach Out, Take a Hand

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Romans 8:15–16

Once, while leading a group of children on a night hike at our Presbyterian camp, I felt a small hand slip into mine. My first response was to think, “This child needs to stay in line like the others.” But I fortunately checked my impulse to follow the rules as I remembered how lonely and frightening a first night at camp could be. Also, I was deeply grateful to receive such trust from this new child.

Paul promises us that we are children of God. Once we were no more than obedient servants trying our best to please God. But now things are different. Now we have been given a special place in the family of God. Perhaps we do not take enough advantage of this special relationship we have with God. Perhaps we have become too self-conscious about staying in line according to other people’s expectations of us. Perhaps we do not realize how grateful our Lord is whenever we break ranks and reach out our hand to take the hand offered by our heavenly parent.

Lord, we are grateful to be part of your family! Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
Conversion

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

Isaiah 6:8

Isaiah’s vision of God is almost too grand for our minds to envision. The Lord sits on a high and lofty throne. Seraphs surround this throne and sing God’s praises. There is trembling. There is brightness. There is smoke. There is fear and despair on Isaiah’s part, until the Lord touches and commissions him. Then Isaiah is sent by God. Isaiah’s life is surely never the same after that.

By contrast, I cannot visualize the one day my relationship with God and this world changed. Perhaps the same is true of you. As I reflect on my life and the lives of many Christians I know, however, I realize our long-term conversion has been just as dramatic. Even without the trembling, smoke, and seraphs, we have all been slowly, but surely, set free by Christ from the clutches of this world. We have been freed from fatalism and cynicism to see life in a new, hopeful way. We know we and our world are in the hands of a loving and purposeful God whom we have been prepared to serve.

Lord, when you are ready, send us. Amen.

Bill Heck, Black Mountain, North Carolina
When I was young, I got involved with someone who was bad for me, ignoring the red flags. God didn’t hit me over the head and say, “Wake up! This is not a good man.” Instead, God allowed me to make a mistake.

Samuel thought the people were making a big mistake when they wanted a king to rule them. He tried to dissuade them, but they insisted. The Lord told him to let them have what they wanted. Why? Because God knew in advance where it would lead—away from Saul’s leadership and eventually toward David’s. God had a plan.

We have the freedom to choose our direction in life. Sometimes we take the wrong one, ignoring the still, small voice that warns us. God’s plan is always the right plan. My life works better when I pray, “Thy will, not mine,” because the Lord wants what’s best for me.

Father, guide us to know and follow your will for our lives. Amen.

Diana L. Walters, Chattanooga, Tennessee
Psalm 138 begins with thanks and praise for the Lord’s love and faithfulness. God is worthy of all our praise and adoration, but how often do we spend more than a passing moment in focused, undiluted worship? Even during the weekly service, my mind often wanders to what I’m fixing for dinner or to the challenges of the week ahead. Every morning I read a devotion and a few Scriptures, and then I go about my routine, rarely talking to the Lord until bedtime—unless I need his help.

The Lord has a plan and a purpose for our lives. We need to be aware of God’s presence, his magnificence, all the time, not just when we’re in trouble. Isaac Watts wrote “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” in 1707. The last stanza includes a reminder of what we owe the Lord: “love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Lord, you deserve our thanks and praise throughout our busy days. Help us to know and fulfill your purpose in our lives. Amen.

Diana L. Walters, Chattanooga, Tennessee